

A BIBLICAL PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

A “philosophy” is a system of belief that governs how we live and what we do.

We all have a certain philosophy about life established through experiences, study, discussion and reflection. But when it comes to spiritual leadership we have the Bible upon which to base a philosophy of ministry to young people. It is certainly not the only factor that contributes to this philosophy, but the belief that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God and contains divine Truth, establishes the non negotiable skeleton from which we operate.

It is the starting point when we come to designing a youth ministry as it defines the essential shape of what we build. Beyond this, our understanding of Scripture, experiences and learning shapes this philosophy and contributes further to the design which we finally implement in our own local church.

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. ¹⁷ It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do.

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17

A Biblical Philosophy of the Church



The diagram above illustrates a Philosophy of the Church based on Biblical principles and accompanying illustrations.

At the centre of His Church is Christ - the Head and the one who gives Life.

Beyond Him there are three elements to the Church:

1. A Worshipping Community - The Family of God
2. A Place of Character Development - The Bride of Christ
3. A Commissioned People - The Body of Christ

The Centrality of Christ

A Biblical philosophy of the Church must begin with an understanding of the Centrality of Christ to the Church:

¹⁶ Christ is the one through whom God created everything in heaven and earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—kings, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities. Everything has been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He existed before everything else began, and he holds all creation together.

¹⁸ Christ is the head of the church, which is his body. He is the first of all who will rise from the dead, so he is first in everything.

- Colossians 1:16-18

Christ is central to all creation and the Church is no exception. This fact forms the basis of our Biblical Philosophy of Youth Ministry, and carries with it some important implications:

1. Christ is the Architect of His Church

Youth Ministry Design is His role. He has already mapped out the path each church and ministry should take and knows how it can best get there.

2. Christ is the Builder of His Church

Christ builds up His church through men and women - we are merely the tools which the Master builder uses. One day we will be retired and others will take our place, but the Builder remains the same.

3. Christ is the Sustainer of His Church

No church or ministry, no matter how effectively designed and built, can ever do without Christ's ongoing presence, for He is the One who continually strengthens and repairs it.

Through all this one thing is clear...

The key to Youth Ministry design is prayer. Through prayer we discover the mind of God in establishing a design and through prayer we receive the resources we need to perform the work in ministry that brings the design to fruition. **Nothing else said in this workbook diminishes or negates this essential truth!**

1. Community - The Family of God

The first element of the Church is that of a family:

¹⁹ So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family.

- Ephesians 2:19

Today we often use the word “church” to refer to a building where Christians meet but we learn here that the word “church” refers to the people themselves - a community of believers.

The Greek word for church is “ekklesia”. It was used in pre-Christian times to denote a meeting of all the citizens of a city, and means literally “called out”. Thus Christians saw themselves as ones who were called out - “out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son” (1 Peter 2:9) and living as a visible representation of the “kingdom of the Son”, illustrating to the world the character of God.

The most attractive thing about the early church was the quality of their community life. They shared possessions and spent time together building significant relationships and praying for each other. They cared and shared, and this lifestyle was what attracted people to them and ultimately to Christ.

Jesus prayed that His people would be one, just as He and the Father are one (John 17:22-23). The evidence of the unity was not merely in the lack of conflict, but in the presence of mutual care and concern.

The Centrality of Christ

The family is headed by Christ - He is to be at the very centre of community life and the source of love.

Implications

A youth ministry is first and foremost a community of young people called out by God to live as His people. The youth ministry therefore must be a counter cultural community of believers that demonstrates the reality of Christ by the lives that its members live. Their corporate life is to have a quality that marks it out from the world and becomes a light to those in darkness. The youth leader cultivates this unity and the youth ministry design provides avenues for the expression of it.

“We don't go to church; we are the church.”

- Earnest Southgate

² We are writing to the church of God in Corinth, you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus, just as he did all Christians everywhere— whoever calls upon the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and theirs.

- 1 Corinthians 1:2

⁹ But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are a kingdom of priests, God's holy nation, his very own possession. This is so you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

- 1 Peter 2:9

2. Character - The Bride of Christ

The second element of the Church is that of a bride:

²⁵ And you husbands must love your wives with the same love Christ showed the church. He gave up his life for her ²⁶ to make her holy and clean, washed by baptism and God's word. ²⁷ He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault.

- Ephesians 5:25-27

In the same way that a pure bride is set apart for her husband only, the church is set apart for Christ alone. This “calling out” of a community carried with it the notion of holiness, a word that has the concept of “setting apart” at its root.

It is God, through Christ, who makes His people holy. We do not become holy by being good. However, because we are in Christ who is holy, believers are expected to live worthy of their calling (Ephesians 4:1). They are called out of the world and its vices, yet at the same time they are called to live among the people of the world as shining lights (Philippians 2:15).

God's people are not only to be holy, but to be loving. Christ has first expressed His love for the church through laying down His life for them. In response they submit themselves to Him and love Him through acts of worship and service.

The Centrality of Christ

Through Christ the church is made holy and He becomes the object of the church's love.

Implications for Youth Ministry Design

A youth ministry design must allow opportunity for instruction, service and worship. Through instruction and service, group members have developed in them character qualities reflecting the fruit of God's Spirit within. Through service and worship, group members express their devotion to Christ.

¹ Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God.

- Ephesians 4:1

You are to live clean, innocent lives as children of God in a dark world full of crooked and perverse people. Let your lives shine brightly before them.

- Philippians 2:15

3. Commission - The Body of Christ

The third element of the Church is that of a body:

⁴ *Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, ⁵ so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of his one body, and each of us has different work to do. And since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others.*
- Romans 12:4-5

The image of the church as being the Body of Christ is a common one in the writings of Paul. Explicit or implicit in each illustration is the role of Christ as the Head of His Church.

Christ is Head of the Church not only in theory but in practice. He leads our local churches and youth ministries and the role of His people, the Body, is to discern the direction of His leadership amidst changing circumstances and personnel.

This discernment and subsequent operation, comes as each member fulfils the role they are uniquely fitted for as a member of the Body of Christ. All have a contribution to make, no matter how young in years or immature in faith. The gifts are distributed according to God's will and His grace. Some will have great significance and visibility, while others will be less apparent, but all are essential for the smooth running of the church. Fulfilling their role will not only allow the church to operate effectively internally, it will also equip the church to fulfil the commission given to it to make disciples.

The Centrality of Christ

As the head of the body, Christ leads His church to fulfil the commission He has given to them.

Implication

In establishing a youth ministry design we need to be mindful that God desires to actively lead us. He is the architect of the ministry and reveals His design to those who will listen. Furthermore young Christians should not be spectators or mere consumers in the church. They are to be participants and a youth ministry design will provide opportunities for young people to participate in the decision making and mission of the ministry.

¹⁸ *Christ is the head of the church, which is his body. He is the first of all who will rise from the dead, so he is first in everything.*
- Colossians 1:18

¹⁹ *Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*
- Matthew 28:19,20

"If we don't grasp the intrinsically corporate nature of Christianity embodied in the church, we are missing the very heart of Jesus' plan."
- Chuck Colson



Assess the degree to which your youth ministry design reflects the three basic elements of the church? Respond to the statements below by placing an "X" on the line. Make notes underneath each item in order to clarify your own thinking:

NO _____ YES
"Our youth ministry design reflects the priority of community life."

NO _____ YES
"Our youth ministry design allows the opportunity for instruction in Christian living."

NO _____ YES
"Our youth ministry design allows the opportunity for expressions of love for God through service."

NO _____ YES
"Our youth ministry design allows the opportunity for expressions of love for God through worship."

NO _____ YES
"Our youth ministry design allows the opportunity for everyone to use their spiritual gifts."

NO _____ YES
"Our youth ministry design recognises the headship of Christ and we seek to follow His leading."

The areas we most need to work on are:

- 1.
- 2.

A Biblical Philosophy of Ministry

The following verses provide a blueprint for Biblical ministry:

¹¹ He is the one who gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹² Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ, ¹³ until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ.

- Ephesians 4:11-13

Examining the fifteen phrases in this passage in more detail we learn:

a. God gave...

Spiritual ministry requires spiritual giftedness. God is both the initiator and architect of spiritual gifts. He confers the gifts and blends them together in His church.

¹⁸ Christ is the head of the church, which is his body. He is the first of all who will rise from the dead, so he is first in everything.

- Colossians 1:18

b. ...these gifts...

God gives "gifts" and a gift by definition is not something that is earned. Gifts are not given to those who have achieved certain levels of spirituality otherwise they would be awards or rewards. Yet it must also be remembered that these gifts will remain dormant and unused unless the recipient develops spiritual maturity.

⁷ However, he has given each one of us a special gift according to the generosity of Christ.

- Ephesians 4:7

c. ...to the church

Gifts are not primarily conferred upon individuals but upon the church - individuals are the recipients, but only as representatives of the church. Therefore no one can withhold their gifts and use them at their own whim or for their own advancement.

⁷ A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church.

- 1 Corinthians 12:7

d. the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers.

The gifts given to the church are diverse. They have different purposes and achieve different results. There is no need for jealousy or pride, as a diversity of gifts is needed for a smooth running church.

⁵ There are different kinds of service in the church, but it is the same Lord we are serving.

- 1 Corinthians 12:5

e. Their responsibility is...

Each person has a responsibility to use the gift that God has given them. They will one day need to give account for their faithfulness in administering their gift(s).

f. ...to equip...

The role of the leader is not to do all the work, but to equip other people for ministry. Their role is to train, encourage and release their people to accomplish acts of ministry. Through this, church members grow in effectiveness and learn reliance upon God and deepen their faith in Him.

g. ...God's people...

A leader must always remember that the people in the church or ministry they oversee belong to God. The leader is called to nurture, shepherd, teach and correct, but never to call them their own.

h. ...to do His work...

Further to the above point, the leader is not even to regard the church or ministry as their own, for these too belong to God. He was active long before the leader took on their responsibilities and He will be at work long after they have gone.

i. ... and build up the church...

While church members themselves benefit from the use of their gifts, that is not the true goal. When members of a church are all using the gifts God has given them, the whole church will benefit through being built up by other's contributions.

j. ...the body of Christ,

The church is not just a group of people - it is far more than that! The call to ministry is a call to take responsibility for the body of Christ in a particular community, helping people to live and minister as Christ would if He was living among them.

²⁹ To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who are unfaithful, even what little they have will be taken away.

- Matthew 25:29

⁵ I left you on the island of Crete so you could complete our work there and appoint elders in each town as I instructed you.

- Titus 1:5

⁵ His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ.

- Ephesians 1:5

¹⁸ Now I say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.

- Matthew 16:18

¹² Since you are so eager to have spiritual gifts, ask God for those that will be of real help to the whole church.

1 Corinthians 14:12

²⁷ Now all of you together are Christ's body, and each one of you is a separate and necessary part of it.

- 1 Corinthians 12:27

k. ...until we come to such unity in our faith...

There is a certain irony in the fact that the gifts, which were intended to bring unity to a church, in fact too often cause disunity and division. Striving for a common goal and focussing on the essential aspects of faith on which we all agree will bring unity.

¹³ Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into Christ's body by one Spirit, and we have all received the same Spirit.
1 Corinthians 12:13

l. ... and knowledge of God's Son...

A goal of ministry is to reconcile people to God (2 Corinthians 5:18-6:1). Inherent in this is a real and intimate relationship with Christ. The goal here is not mere knowledge **about** God's Son. As important as this is, it is a means to an end, the end being to have personal first hand knowledge **of** Him - to know Him.

¹⁸ All this newness of life is from God, who brought us back to himself through what Christ did. And God has given us the task of reconciling people to him.
- 2 Corinthians 5:18

m. ... that we will be mature and full grown

Beyond reconciling people to God we are to help them to live as effective disciples. This is not an instant event but an ongoing process, in the same way that emotional and social maturity, along with physical development, is an extended process.

So let us stop going over the basics of Christianity again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding.
- Hebrews 6:1a

n. ... in the Lord...

This growth is not achieved in the believer's own strength or even through the leadership of others. Ultimately, maturity is possible because the believer is "in Christ", and as such have become a new creation with a new identity and a new power to overcome sin and to experience spiritual growth.

¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.
- 2 Corinthians 5:17

o. ... measuring up to the full stature of Christ.

The measuring stick for spiritual maturity is not other people. Measuring our spiritual maturity against others leads to self righteousness, pride and a critical spirit. Instead the measure of maturity is Christ. It is He whom we fix our eyes upon as we strive in our faith, and it is He alone whom we must ultimately seek to please.

And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us. ²We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish.
- Hebrews 12:1b-2a

Family Principles of Ministry

In developing a Biblical philosophy of Ministry we need to give thought to two conflicting approaches to ministry: ministry according to organisational principles, and ministry according to family principles.

a. The Focus

Programme vs. People

Organisation: The goal becomes an impressive structure with superb programmes and events.

Family: The goal becomes structures, programmes and events that best serve the needs of the people.

Excellent programmes and events are a good thing to aim for, but leadership must ensure that they achieve an end, and do not become an end in themselves.

b. The Decisions

Organisational Needs vs. Individual Needs

Organisation: Decisions are made according to the needs of the organisation.

Family: Decisions are made according to the criteria of individual's personal growth and development.

Tasks are not always given to the best people but to those who might benefit the most. Otherwise, inexperienced people who need encouragement can be overlooked in favour of the more capable, but overworked people.

c. Leadership

Administration skills vs. People skills

Organisation: Leaders tend to be the ones who love organisation, have administrative gifts and can contribute to the effective running of an organisation.

Family: Leaders tend to be the ones who love people, have people related gifts and can nurture the individual.

A church needs good administrators, but if the church is primarily about people, and it is to retain that focus, then those with people related gifts must feature in leadership positions.

d. Commitment

Commitment to an Organisation vs. Commitment to People

Organisation: People's loyalty is to the church in the sense of it being an institution or "brand".

Family: People's loyalty is to the people who constitute the church and their welfare.

If the church should undergo changes, or if decisions are made that don't fully satisfy the individual, they will remain loyal because of the importance of their relationships with others.

e. Satisfaction

Personal Satisfaction vs. Personal Sacrifice

Organisation: People's underlying question in viewing church life is, "Is this organisation (church) meeting my needs?"

Family: People's underlying question in viewing church life is, "How can I meet the needs of these people?"

A consumer mentality breeds selfishness. It stands in stark contrast to the Biblical ethic of putting other's needs first and looking for ways to offer sacrificial service.

f. Success

Productivity vs. Maturity

Organisation: The more people attending programmes and activities, the more successful the ministry is deemed to be.

Family: The more people are showing evidence of growing maturity, the more successful the ministry is deemed to be.

Christ intends that His church should grow and that means numbers. Therefore growth in numbers is important but growth in faith and love is more important.

Quality leads to quantity, but quantity does not guarantee quality.

A final note...

Because Christ regards His church as a family, He expects ministry to occur according to family principles. However, that in no way gives permission for the church to be disorganised. In a family, parents are primarily concerned with the nurture of the family, not the organisation of the family. They will organise their household but they do this as a means to an end, the end being the nurture and instruction of their children.



Do you perform ministry according to primarily organisational principles or family principles? Respond to the statements below by placing an "x" on the line. Make notes underneath each item in order to clarify your own thinking:

"Do you find yourself hoping that a lot of people will come to a programme, not because you have their best interests at heart, but because you want your programme (and you!) to look successful."

NO YES

"Do you choose people to do a task who will do it most efficiently and effectively as opposed to those who will gain the most from doing it?"

NO YES

"Are the leaders in your youth group the ones who tend to be good organisers rather than good at working with young people and modelling their faith?"

NO YES

"Do you find yourself thinking more about "the ministry" than you do about "the people"?"

NO YES

"In looking ahead to your own future ministry possibilities, do you think primarily about what is best for you, than what is best for the people you lead?"

NO YES

"Do you find yourself measuring your success by the numbers who attend your youth ministry, rather than the lives that are being changed?"

NO YES



Summarise your thoughts on this session by identifying those key points that need integrating into your (existing) philosophy of youth ministry in the local church:

The Centrality of Christ

The Church:

a. Community

b. Character

c. Commission

Ministry:

a. A Blueprint

b. Family Principles vs Organisational Principles

For Further Thought...

Reflect on the extent to which the Biblical philosophy of the church and ministry outlined in these pages has been relevant to your life and ministry. Give examples based on your experiences.

